

2008 - 2018



ASHFORD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Ashford
best placed in Britain

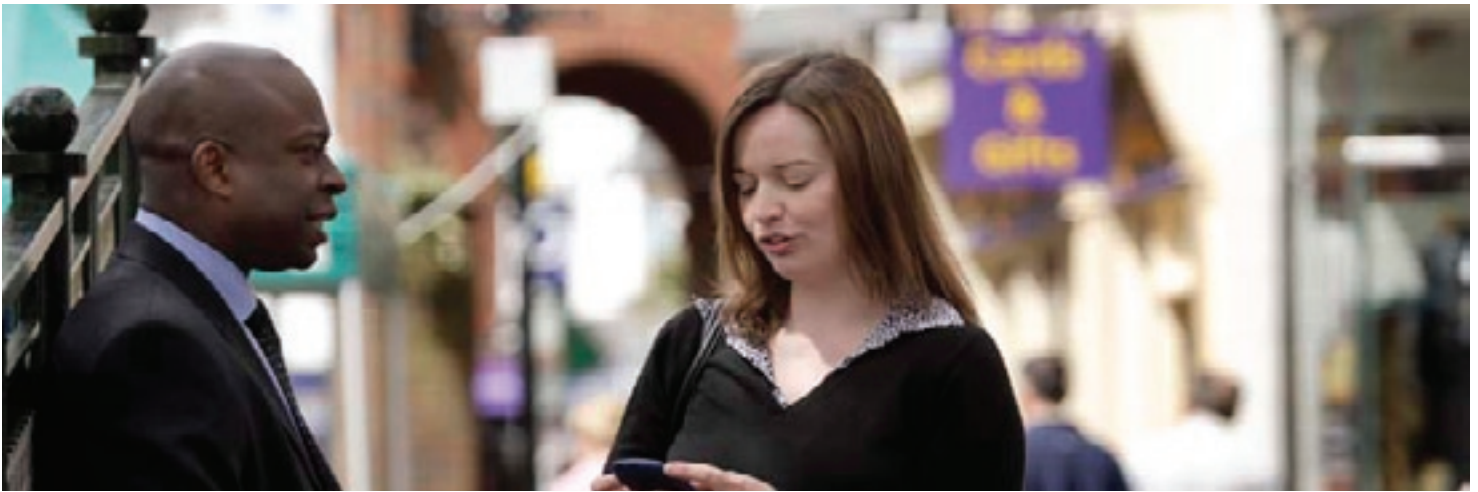
FOREWORD

The Ashford Partnership brings together all those organisations that provide services to residents of the borough of Ashford. The Partners are committed to working together in order to achieve better outcomes for the community and to operate as economically and efficiently as possible.

This new Sustainable Community Strategy provides a clear vision for how the borough of Ashford should develop over the next 10 years, and sets out the key objectives that the whole Partnership will seek to achieve.

The new Strategy reflects the outcomes of an Ipsos/MORI survey of residents' views in late 2006 and is based on extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including a successful stakeholder workshop held in March 2008.





During the next 10 years the transformation of Ashford town centre will continue and there will be significant housing growth in the Ashford urban area. One of the key aims of the Ashford Partnership is to ensure that new housing is accompanied by new jobs and by all the necessary social and community infrastructure (health facilities, play areas and much more). We want to ensure that these major changes will improve the quality of life for all residents of the borough. Above all we want to create a positive sense of community across the borough as a whole, so that new and existing residents develop a joint sense of belonging and develop into a strong and cohesive community. By 2018 Ashford will be an exemplar for how to build sustainable communities.

The Ashford Partnership is also keen that the borough should contribute to the objectives of the wider Kent Partnership as expressed in the Kent-wide Sustainable Community Strategy – the Vision for Kent – and in the Kent Local Area Agreement that has recently been agreed between the Kent Partnership and the Government. The Ashford Sustainable Community Strategy is therefore based on the eight themes of the Vision for Kent and our action plans will incorporate relevant objectives from the Local Area Agreement.



David Hill
Chief Executive, Ashford Borough Council
Chairman of the Ashford Partnership



Richard Finlinson MBE
Chair, Ashford Community Network
Vice Chair, Ashford Partnership



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Theme 1

LEARNING FOR EVERYONE



The Challenge:

Improving learning opportunities in Ashford – from pre-school to post-retirement - will help people to make and take opportunities to get the most out of life. Ashford's growth agenda makes skills development in the Ashford workforce a particularly important issue and this was acknowledged at a stakeholder event in March 2008. The growing sectors of the economy tend to demand high skills levels.

Learning is important at all ages but a particular focus is needed on further and higher education in Ashford. There is a tendency for young people to leave the borough to seek training and, if insufficient skilled jobs are available, they often do not return. But this generation is crucial – they will be needed to drive a rapidly growing economy in the area. For young people who do stay locally, better opportunities are needed to continue training after school. A high proportion of local people gain National Vocational Qualification level 3. Many will look to develop their skills further and need good local training available to make the significant step to level 4 and beyond.



The Partnership's response:

» We will work together to help deliver a new, state of the art Learning Campus for the borough. This will dramatically improve local opportunities for post 16 education and broaden the courses on offer for local people. But the Campus will also cater for the community as a whole – for example, by providing adult education and public events – and become a major new venue for the community of Ashford;

» We will work together to make sure that pre-school, junior and secondary school facilities are designed and operated as an integral part of new and existing communities in Ashford. Schools need to work alongside other local facilities such as health centres, community buildings, shops and leisure uses to make up multi-purpose local centres where everyday needs can be catered for. This helps to build a stronger sense of community and, by grouping local services, reduces the need for people to drive.



**Focus for Partnership Activity:
KCC Education, South Kent College**

Theme 2

ECONOMIC SUCCESS - OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

The Challenge:

Building sustainable communities relies on there being a range of local employment opportunities to act as a viable alternative to commuting to London or elsewhere. We know that Ashford has a high rate of business formation, but many of these fledgling businesses do not survive longer than 2 years. The challenge will be to find ways to extend the life of more of these businesses and allow them to expand without having to move out of the area.

To achieve the borough's target of 28,000 new jobs by 2031, it will also be important to capitalise on the launch of high-speed domestic services to London and the continuation of international services from Ashford International to attract new businesses that can exploit this connectivity. We must also ensure that the infrastructure improvements needed to make Ashford "Best Placed" for business are delivered on time and that the town of Ashford provides services and facilities that attract and retain employers and their workforces.

As well as the scale of growth in jobs, it will also be important for the borough to attract good quality employment to increase the average earnings of its residents and prosperity within the area. This will be

integrally linked with the challenge to improve the skills within the local workforce

Outside of the growth area, local employment opportunities need to be fully explored so that the positive benefits of the growth of the town can be enjoyed by all. These could include enhancements to the tourism industry, already a major employer and income generator, and finding more diverse business opportunities for farms and smallholdings.





The Partnership's response:

- » We will continue the transformation of Ashford town centre to ensure that the town meets the needs of new and existing businesses and a growing population;
- » We will support the preferred developer for the Elwick Place site (south of Elwick Road) in promoting a major new mixed use development that will set new standards of design and sustainability, bringing new jobs, new leisure facilities and new housing to help revitalise the town centre;
- » We will ensure that people using the railway stations – especially after the launch of high-speed domestic services in 2009 – have a pleasurable experience and gain a positive impression of Ashford by providing improvements to the integration of the station with the expanding town centre;
- » We will work with landowners and developers to ensure that new and expanding businesses have access to a range of flexible workspaces and we will provide a package of business support services to help businesses to expand and compete effectively through

engagement, involvement and community ownership;

» We will market Ashford as an attractive location for inward investment, building on the strengths within the existing economy and its position as a transport hub;

» We will look to develop Ashford as a 21st Century town with 21st Century telecommunications infrastructure to support jobs growth and community benefits; and

» We will continue to support the Tenterden Improved project to maintain the special character of the town and to enhance its appeal. And we will liaise with parish councils in reviewing their Parish Plans to capture some of the benefits of Ashford's growth and promote rural diversification and tourism opportunities.

**Focus for Partnership Activity:
Economic Development Working Group**

Theme 3

IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLBEING



The Challenge:

While the health of people living in Ashford Borough is generally close to the average for England there are some areas for concern including a higher incidence of smoking during pregnancy, lower levels of physical activity in children and a greater proportion of road injuries and deaths. There are also health inequalities in Ashford which need to be addressed.

Access to good health care is a consistent factor in determining people's well being and this is supported by a recent poll of Ashford residents that identified providing high standards of health and social care as one of the top three priorities for the Council and its partners in a survey in 2006.

An additional challenge for Ashford will be to ensure that new facilities and capacity are provided to meet the needs of the growing population.



The Partnership's response:

- » We will reduce health inequalities in Ashford through projects that tackle the health priorities highlighted. The Primary Care Trust (PCT) has allocated £300,000 over a three year period to support projects that will deliver these outcomes, for example, the introduction of a “Green Gym” at the Singleton Environment Centre during 2008/9;
- » We will ensure that health and social care facilities are provided in line with housing growth and maximise the wider benefits for improvements in health arising from new housing and job opportunities;
- » We will develop a substantial new health facility at Kings Avenue, Ashford;
- » We will work with and support the East Kent Hospital's Trust's application for Foundation Trust status to improve local involvement and ownership in the Trust's facilities located in Ashford.



**Focus for Partnership Activity:
The Health & Well Being Sub-Group**

Theme 4

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE

The Challenge:

Not surprisingly, residents rated the importance of safeguarding the natural environment of the borough very highly in the MORI survey. It is crucial that where development takes place in the Ashford growth area and in the other towns and villages in the borough, it is well designed with as little impact as possible.

This can be achieved in various ways. The growth agenda is firmly based on the principle of 'mend before extend' and making the best use possible of land – especially 'brown field' sites. But if land is to be used more intensively then the quality of individual buildings and the way places are laid out becomes even more important. There is now a strong tradition in the borough of local people and other stakeholders working together to help create better places in design workshops.

There are many ways of dealing with other environmental impacts. Increased water demand, for example, puts pressure on local water sources and their habitats. By introducing water efficiency devices into existing homes we can reduce water bills,

and slow increases in demand while new water sources (like the new pipe from Bewl reservoir) are provided.

More widely the increasing threat from global climate change and the rapid increase in fuel costs make it even more important than ever that we reduce energy consumption. There are lots of things we can do to help. Designing homes that need less energy and building and insulating them to higher standards is one important step. Another is exploring ways we can make 'renewable' energy – for example, from the sun, wind and ground heat – or using crops such as coppicing to fuel wood boilers to generate heat and power.





The Partnership's response:

» Our aim is to protect the borough's environment and, even where development is needed, to set and achieve high environmental standards in areas such as water supply and quality; protecting important landscape and habitats and making sure there is no increase in the likelihood or severity of flooding;

» Where major development is planned we will make sure that places of real quality are created with attractive open spaces that contribute to the 'green necklace' of spaces around the town, along with major new resources like the Willesborough Dykes Nature Park and the Discovery Park;

» These will be developed to provide accessible open spaces for existing and new residents, which relate well to existing rural

uses and activities and promote biodiversity by for example, using low intensity agricultural practices;

» We will ensure that there is adequate open space for sports and recreation associated with new educational facilities; and

» We will lead by example in setting and delivering high standards of sustainability in projects and services that we are responsible for (such as the Singleton Environment Centre). This will help to reduce our impact on the environment and encourage the community to play its part in meeting the carbon challenge.

**Focus for Partnership Activity:
Ashford's Future Green Spaces Group**

Theme 5

STRONGER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES

The Challenges:

Improving community safety and reducing anti social behaviour had consistently been identified by residents as a top priority for the Council and its partners. This message was reinforced not only by the MORI survey, but also by the subsequent “What Matters?” consultation targeted at young people in the borough, demonstrating that these are issues for all age groups.

This is despite the fact that Ashford has relatively low levels of crime in comparison with other local authority areas nationwide. But perceptions are important, so this will continue to be a focus for the Ashford Partnership. One visible and effective way forward is to provide adequate leisure and recreation facilities, especially for young people, in accessible locations.

It will also be important to ensure that new communities can quickly develop a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in their area. That will help to create truly sustainable local communities and make it easier to integrate new residents and new developments into

the area to produce a strong and cohesive community within the Ashford growth area as a whole.

Rural communities throughout the borough, although often benefiting from a strong identification with their local area and supported by parish council structures, remain under threat – including through a lack of access to retail facilities and other services.





The Partnership's Response:

» In tackling “low level” crime and anti social behaviour the Partnership has an excellent base to build upon, having already created a multi agency Community Safety Unit. This brings together police, borough council staff and officers from many other organisations, all working from the Old Police Station in Tufton Street. Apart from providing the public with a single point of contact, this makes it easy to work across organisational boundaries and to respond quickly and efficiently to community concerns. Statutory and voluntary organisations will be actively encouraged to share space in this unit;

» The borough also benefits from a strong and effective Youth Forum, giving young people a real say. We will build on this by coordinating the youth services provided by Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council to ensure they have maximum impact and by establishing more neighbourhood youth forums throughout the borough;

» We will work with developers to ensure that the layout and design of major new developments facilitates the emergence of

strong communities with a clear sense of identity and a readiness to work together. This will include support for the voluntary sector, the provision of community facilities, especially for young people, funding for community development workers and measures to promote community engagement, involvement and ownership; and

» We will continue to work with local communities, parish council, community groups and others throughout the borough to enhance and extend local community facilities and other services; and to provide the possibility of establishing parishes in the Ashford urban area.

**Focus for Partnership Activity:
The Community Safety Partnership**

Theme 6

ENJOYING LIFE

The Challenges:

The availability of cultural, sporting and leisure opportunities is a key component in people's "quality of life". Participation in such activities promotes physical and emotional well being and can help to build a sense of community. Varied and high quality cultural, sporting and leisure activities can also be an important factor in attracting families and business to relocate to the area.

Ashford has a thriving cultural life and good sporting facilities. As the town grows, the challenge will be to ensure that adequate additional facilities are provided and that all parts of the community have good access to them. One challenge will be to encourage more leisure activity in the town centre, to play its part in transforming and rejuvenating the town centre. It will also be necessary to "raise our sights" and secure new facilities, particularly arts and cultural facilities that can respond to the aspirations of the growing community, helping to make Ashford distinctive and perhaps play a sub regional role.

A particular challenge will be to secure funding for new facilities, whether from

Government or from developers, particularly in difficult economic conditions.

Ensuring access to the whole range of cultural, sporting and leisure activities will also be a challenge. This is not just a matter of meeting the needs of disabled people. The Council's OMAI study in 2006 identified a range of problems for rural communities in accessing such facilities; and the borough has many groups that are vulnerable to social exclusion.





The Partnership's Response:

» We will seek to expand cultural, leisure and sporting facilities in line with the growth in the population, negotiating vigorously with Government and its agencies and with developers to meet the initial capital costs;

» In particular, we will put additional effort into building up arts and cultural opportunities, developing arts programmes, building audiences and demonstrating the need for new facilities. We aim to provide a new arts/cultural venue in the town centre in the short term. We will work towards the provision of a major new sub regional cultural venue that will transform Ashford's cultural offer;

» Meanwhile we will support Active Ashford in building on the excellent sporting facilities already in place across the borough to encourage higher levels of participation in sporting activities for all age groups, but particularly for young people. We will pursue the opportunity to develop a sub regional water sports facility at Conningbrook, to complement the Julie Rose Stadium. We will encourage the use of venues within the borough as pre 2012 training camps and exploit the Olympics to encourage people to take up a sport.

**Focus for Partnership Activity:
The Community Infrastructure
Working Group**

Theme 7

KEEPING ASHFORD MOVING

The Challenges:

The borough is uniquely well served by transport infrastructure, justifying its claim to be “best placed”. There are excellent road and rail links to London and to Dover and Folkestone, Eurostar connections to Paris, Brussels and Lille and good connections to the rest of Kent and East Sussex. The challenge is to exploit those linkages to the fullest effect in order to promote sustainable growth and local economic prosperity, rather than becoming a commuter area or a place that travellers pass through on their way to somewhere else.

The compact growth model proposed for the Ashford urban area relies heavily on the timely provision of new road schemes and high quality public transport, giving residents a real choice to walk, cycle or travel by bus when making local journeys. This will require Ashford partners to make an effective case to

central Government for sustained funding to deliver critical transport infrastructure.

The challenge in the rural parts of the borough will be to improve access to the necessary range of services, making it easier for people to get to and from Ashford and other local service centres.





The Partnership Response:

» We will work with Southeastern and Southern Railways and bus operators to ensure that the combination of high speed and “traditional “ rail services to and from London best meets the needs of all residents and that Ashford International is well served by local bus services;

» We will support the Highways Agency in bringing forward plans for a new motorway junction south of Junction 10 on the M20; and upgrade the capacity of Junction 9 and the associated Drivers’ roundabout;

» We will promote plans to build a new road (“Victoria Way”) between Beaver Road and Brookfield Road to open up new sites for development and provide an alternative route around the town centre;

» We will establish a Quality Bus Partnership with the bus operators, with the aim of improving bus services throughout the borough in the short term and laying the foundations for a high specification, high frequency bus network (to be known as SMARTLINK) that will serve the growth area;

» We will enhance the already good cycle network and make sure that new developments make adequate provision for cycle ways and footpaths;

» We will implement a Parking Strategy that will meet the needs of residents, employees, shoppers and visitors, opening the town’s first Park and Ride by 2010 and a new town centre multi storey car park shortly thereafter; and

» We will investigate more community based services to improve rural accessibility, such as the Wealden Wheels project.

**Focus for Partnership Activity:
Ashford’s Future’s Transport Forum**

Theme 8

ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY HOMES

The Challenges:

The provision of good quality housing that is affordable for local people was the second highest priority for local residents, as identified by the IPSOS/MORI survey.

The Council, as planning authority, and its partners need to work together to ensure that new housing is provided in an appropriate mix of sizes and tenures that meets the current and future needs of the community. It will be particularly important to ensure that enough housing is provided through Housing Associations or on a “shared equity” basis to enable young people and others on low incomes to secure accommodation that they can afford.

The number of homes built to meet “local needs” in the rural areas of the borough is amongst the highest for any district council nationwide, but house prices remain out of reach for many local people so there is still

much to do to help meet these needs and help preserve the vitality of rural communities.

Given the ambition to deliver a relatively compact growth model for the Ashford urban area, new housing developments will need to be relatively high density. This will place a premium on good design. Good design must also promote community safety, sustainability (e.g. by facilitating public transport) and the development of a positive sense of community.

Whilst new housing needs to be built to increasingly demanding sustainability standards, it is also important to improve the energy and water efficiency of the existing housing stock and generally to ensure that all housing in the borough meets the “decent homes” standard. This will help to reduce our impact on natural resources and cut people’s household bills.



The Partnership's Response:

» We will demand high design standards in new housing or mixed use developments and promote the use of innovation in construction. We will continue to promote extensive stakeholder engagement during the preparation of Development Briefs and other planning documents;

» In line with housing needs, at least 30% of the housing units in major developments will be social rented units or available on a low cost shared equity basis. Appropriate provision will be made to meet the housing needs of the elderly and other disadvantaged groups;

» We will insist on high environmental standards for all new dwellings and set up a mechanism to support the “retrofitting” of water and energy efficiency measures to existing dwellings;

» We will complete the regeneration of the Stanhope estate and undertake a programme

of environmental improvements to other areas with high concentrations of social housing; and

» We will work with parish councils to identify and meet local housing needs in rural communities.

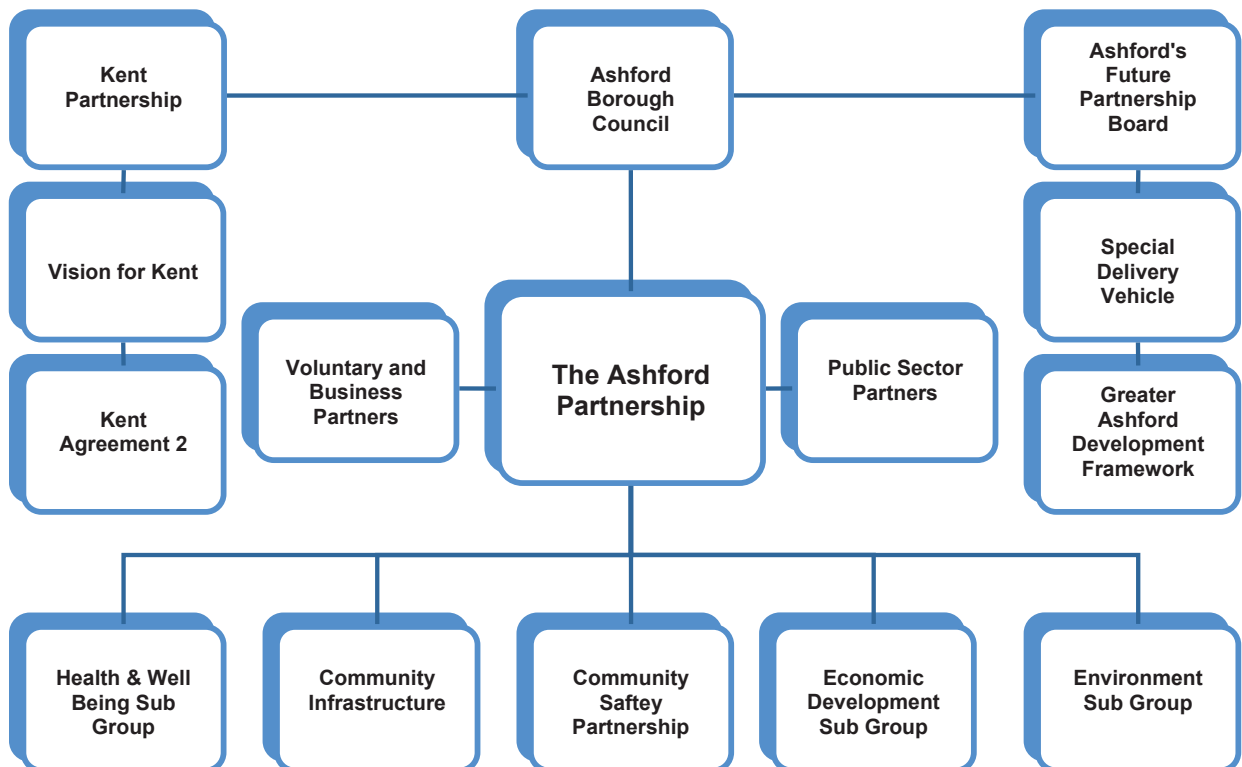


More on the Ashford Partnership

The Ashford Partnership was established in 2002 and adopted the first Community Strategy in 2004. The Partnership comprises an Executive Board, which meets up to 5 times a year and provides a strategic overview for partnership working in the borough. In addition there are a number of working groups which report to the Ashford Partnership Board. These have a more operational focus and through

their own action plans will deliver the themed outcomes in the Sustainable Community Strategy and through these, the district level targets within the Kent Agreement.

The illustration outlines the make up of the Ashford Partnership and the relationships with other key delivery agencies in Ashford.



Membership of the Ashford Partnership

(Ashford's Local Strategic Partnership - LSP)

Allen Wells

Ashford Borough Council (Councillor)

Monica Box

South Kent College (Interim Principal)

Jo James

Local Chamber

David Geoghegan

Kent County Council
(Ashford Community Liaison Manager)

David Hill

Ashford Borough Council Chief Executive
Local Strategic Partnership Chair

Jan Perfect

Mid & SE Kent Council for Voluntary Services

Hilary Moorby

Kent Association of Parish Councils

Amanda Harrison

Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT

Abby Raymond

Ashford's Future

Mick Fleming

Ashford Citizen's Advice Bureau

Mike Angell

Kent County Council (Councillor)

Paul Clokie

Ashford Borough Council (Councillor Leader)

Richard Finlinson

Ashford Community Network

Chief Inspector John Frayne

Kent Constabulary

Rev Tim Williams

Churches Together in Ashford

Heather Juman

Housing Corporation

Joanna Hill

Government Office for the South East
(GOSE)

Peter Davison

Ashford Borough Council (Councillor)

Mrs Jill Hutchinson

Ashford Borough Council (Councillor)

Andrew Merriman

Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Ian Robinson

South East England Development Agency
(SEEDA)

Cllr Mike Hill

Kent County Council (Cabinet Member)

Vacant post

Kent County Council (Officer Representative)

Vacant post

Action with Communities in Rural Kent